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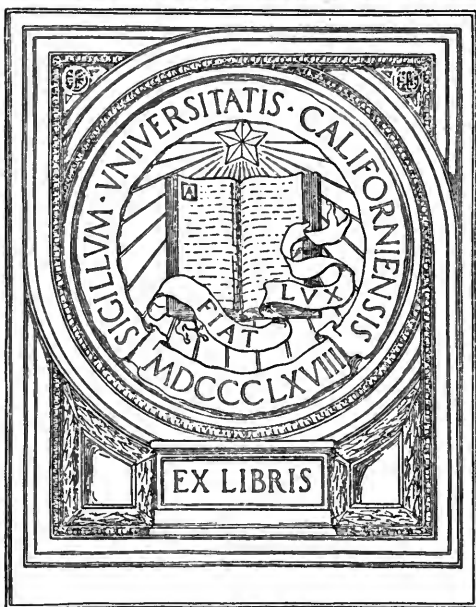
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THE WAGI IN THE WEST AND THEIR SEARCH FOR THE CHRIST: A Tale For The Christmas-Tide.



FREDERIC B. DEWHURST

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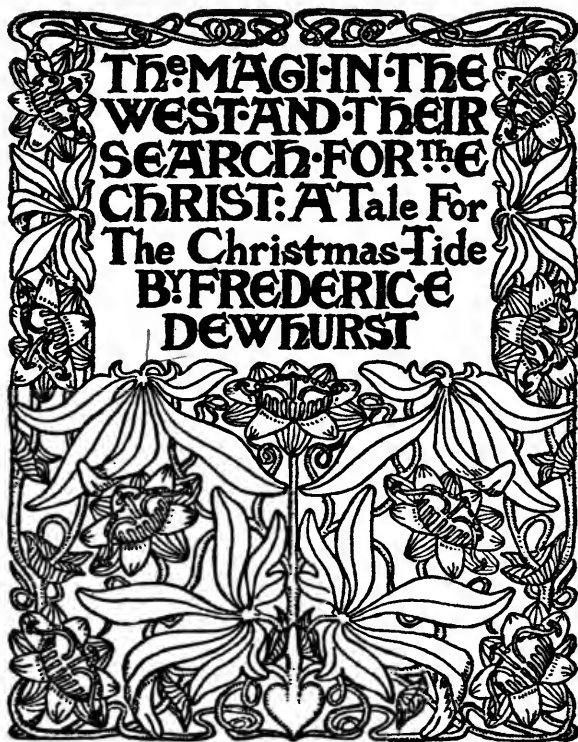
GIFT OF
L. Campbell

To Mrs. Campbell -

In the spirit of the first
Christmas.

Sarah Maria Torrey.





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NOW it happened a long time ago, in the year —, but the exact year does not matter, because you will not find this story written in the history of any of the nations of the world. But in one of the countries of Europe bordering on the Mediterranean Sea was a lofty mountain, which, to the dwellers in the plains below, seemed to reach to the very sky. At times its summit was covered with clouds, so that it could not be seen; at other times it stood out fair and clear, as though silently asking the people to look up and not down. The lower slopes of the mountain were covered with olive trees, with groves of oranges and lemons, and with vineyards, and they were dotted here and there with the little white cottages of the peasants who made their living from these groves and vineyards, the fruit of which they sold in the city not far away.

The mountain
of vision

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Sunset in
the sea

Along the mountain-side wound a foot-trail even to the summit, and nowhere, in all the region, was there a finer view of the Mediterranean than from the summit of this mountain. In the long summer afternoons the peasants and children would climb to the top, and look off on the lovely picture of land and sea. Then they would eat their simple lunch of bread and dates and olives, quenching their thirst from the spring on the mountain-side, which they called "Dew-of-heaven," so clear and fresh and sparkling was it; and when the sun began to touch the western sky with his pencils of gold and carmine and purple, they hastened down, that they might reach their cottages before the night shut in.

On the day when this story begins a man was standing on the summit of the mountain looking across the sea in the direction where you will find

Tyre and Joppa on the map. He was, very plainly, not one of the peasants who lived on the mountain-side. He looked about sixty years of age; he was tall and erect, though he carried a staff in his hand. His hair and beard were long and flowing, and almost gray, but his eye was clear and penetrating, and he was looking across the sea as though he expected some one to appear.

A stranger
cometh

And while he stood there gazing seaward, there appeared a second man on the summit, helping himself up with his staff, and panting with the effort of the long climb. From his dress and manner it was plain that this man, too, was not one of the peasants, for, like the first comer, he seemed to belong to another age and clime. The two men glanced at each other and gave such greeting as strangers might who should meet in so solitary a spot as a mountain summit.

And findeth a friend Then both lapsed into silence and looked off across the sea.

Presently the last comer seemed to wake from his reverie; he walked over to the place where the other was sitting, still gazing off toward Joppa, and touched him on the shoulder: "A thousand pardons, my friend," he said, "but my mind is haunted with some far-off recollection, as though in some other land and some far-off time I had seen thy face. Wilt thou have the kindness to tell me thy name?"

Without lifting his eyes from the sea, and in a tone which seemed regretful and sad, the stranger replied: "My name is Gaspard."

"Gaspard! Indeed, then have I seen thee! Look at me, my friend; dost thou not remember me? My name is Melchior. Dost thou not recall that time, how long ago I know not, when thou and I and Balthazar followed a

star which led us to a little Jewish hamlet, thou bearing gold and I frankincense, and Balthazar myrrh? Dost thou not remember how, on the long journey thither, we talked about the young Prince, whom we expected to find in a royal palace, and how at last when we reached the village, following the star, we were led not to a palace, but to a little inn, and not even to a room within the inn, but to the stable-yard, where we found a sweet-faced peasant woman bending over a babe cradled in a manger; and standing near, a sturdy peasant, proud and happy, whose name was Joseph? Dost thou not remember, too, that when we had recovered from our surprise, we left our gifts and greetings, and went our way as men who had been dreaming? Gaspard, dost thou not remember?"

And Gaspard, looking now intently in the other's face, replied: "Yes,

A far-off pilgrimage recalled

And
wanderings
in many
lands

Melchior, I remember thee, and I remember the journey of which thou hast spoken better than I remember aught else. Neither have I forgotten the surprise and disappointment with which we came to the place whither the star led us; nor how, after leaving our gifts, we went away as in a dream; and, Melchior, I have been dreaming ever since. Even here hast thou found me in a dream of perplexity. I am still Gaspard, the wandering magician; for how many years I know not, I have wandered up and down these lands of Europe. I have crossed the seas; in every place I have sought to find the kingdom over which we were told this young prince was one day to reign. Dost thou not remember that we were told his kingdom was to last forever, that he would reign in it himself forever and would never die? Alas! I have lost the old power of the magician's art. I can

summon no star to guide me to the place where I shall find this kingdom and its king."

"Truly, Gaspard," answered Melchior, "the story of your wanderings is but the repetition of my own; and even now was I drawn to this mountain summit on the self-same errand that brought you here,—to see if I could not discover in the direction of yonder land, where Bethlenem was, some star which might prove to be His star, and which might guide me in the new quest. If only our old companion, Balthazar, were with us now, he might give us the clew to our search, for not only was he more skilful in the magician's art, but he was braver and more courageous, and withal more serene in spirit."

Now, even while Melchior was speaking, a voice was heard a little way down the mountain. Gaspard and Melchior stopped to listen. The

If only
Balthazar
were here

A song voice was singing, and the words of
in the air the song floated up to them distinctly:

If the sun has hid its light,
If the day has turned to night,
If the heavens are not benign,
If the stars refuse to shine—
Heart of man lose not thy hope;
Door, there's none that shall not ope;
Path, there's none that shall not clear;
Heart of man! why shouldst thou fear!

If for years should be thy quest,
If for years thou hast no rest,
If thou circlest earth and sea,
If thou worn and weary be—
Heart of man, lose not thy hope;
Door, there's none that shall not ope;
Path, there's none that shall not clear;
Heart of man! why shouldst thou fear!

“That,” exclaimed Gaspard and Melchior together, “is the voice of Balthazar,” and they hastened to meet him, for he was now almost at the summit, and the refrain of his song was still upon his lips. At that

moment Balthazar sprang up from the sloping path into full view of the two men, and, giving each a hand, exclaimed: "Gaspard, Melchior, beloved companions, I have found you at last. The peasants below were not mistaken. From their description, I was certain I should find you here. And you, too, have been searching these long years for the kingdom of the Christ! and, like me, you have met with disappointment; but, comrades, be not of faint heart:

Balthazar
cometh

Door, there's none that shall not ope;
Path, there's none that shall not clear.

Let us hasten down the mountain, for see! the sky is already growing gold and crimson beyond the pillars of Hercules. Let us seek the wayfarers' lodging with the hospitable peasants in the valley, and to-morrow let us begin our search for the Christ anew. We have wandered alone; let

Forget not
hospitality

us invoke now the star to guide us together.”

That night, therefore, the three strangers lodged with the simple peasant people in the valley, partaking with thankfulness of the coarse bread, the dates and the red wine—the common fare of their daily life. Nor did they fail to notice a motto inscribed above the fireplace in rude Greek letters:

ΤΗΣ ΦΙΛΟΞΕΝΙΑΣ ΜΗ
ΕΠΙΛΑΘΑΝΕΣΘΕ



IN the morrow they were ready to begin their search together for the Christ, and they hoped not to wander far before they should find at least the outskirts of His kingdom. But whither should they go? In what direction should they first turn their steps?

Once more
a star

While they were thus wondering and debating, Balthazar suddenly exclaimed: "I see the star!" And behold, a little way before them, and at no great distance above their heads, they discerned in the gray of the early morning a star of pale, opal light, which seemed to move forward as the men moved toward it.

"We must follow the star!" Balthazar said, in a whisper. Silently and breathlessly his companions followed on.

Now, so intently did the three men keep their eyes fixed upon the star, and so eagerly did they follow in the direction where it seemed to lead, that it was only after a considerable time they discovered that they had become separated from each other, and that their paths were getting farther and farther apart. Yet, there before each of them was the star, shining with its soft, opalescent light, and still ringing

The star
stands
still

in their ears were the words of Bal-
thazar—"we must follow the star."

So each followed the star, each by himself alone. Gaspard's path wound along near the shore of the gulfs and bays of the Mediterranean, until at last the star turned southward and drew him nearer and nearer to a great city, and finally stood still over the dome of a vast cathedral. "It must be," thought Gaspard, "that I have come to the end of my search. This must be the capital and palace of the eternal king."

The square in front of the cathedral was thronged with people; multitudes were pouring in through the great portals. Gaspard joined the throngs, and at last found himself under the mighty dome, which seemed to him as far away as the sky itself. Everything in this wonderful place appealed to his imagination. There were great rows of massive columns, symbol of

a strength eternal, and they seemed like wide-open arms holding out a welcome to the human race. There were statues and paintings by great masters in art. The light of the sun poured in through many-colored windows, on which were blazoned the deeds of heroes and saints. Strains of music from the great organ in the distance floated out upon the air. Touched and thrilled by all he saw, Gaspard exclaimed to himself: "The place on which I stand is holy ground."

Soon, however, he perceived that the throngs of people were not lingering, like himself, in awe and wonder over the great columns and the dome, and the statues, and the paintings, and the windows. Their eyes were fixed intently upon something that was going on in the far end of the cathedral. An altar was there, and priests in white robes passing up and down before it, and tall tapers burning around

Marbled
aisle's
magnificence

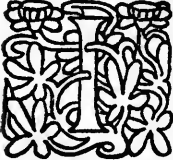
Kyrie
eleison

it. Near the altar was the image of a man hanging from a cross; his hands and feet were pierced with nails, and a cruel wound was in his side. The people were gazing at this altar, and at the image, and at what the white-robed priests were doing. The strains of solemn music from the organ blended with the voices of priests chanting the service. Clouds of incense rose from censers, swung with solemn motion by the altar-boys, and the fragrance of the incense was wafted down the long aisles. At last, the tinkling of a bell. The organ became silent for an instant, as though it felt within its heart the awful solemnity of the moment; and then it burst forth into new rapture, and the people began pouring out through the great doors.

Gaspard went forth with the throng into the cathedral square. "And this," he said, "is the end of my search. I

have found the Christ. His kingdom is in the imagination of man. How beautiful, how wonderful, how strange it was! 'Dominus vobiscum,' did not the priests say? Here, then, at last I have found the city of the great King."

But as he lingered, behold! the star which had stood over the dome of the cathedral was now before him, as at first, and seemed to waver and tremble, as if beckoning him on. So, although his feet seemed bound to the spot, and his heart was still throbbing with the deep feelings the cathedral service had created in him, remembering the words of Balthazar, "we must follow the star," he slowly and reluctantly walked on.

N the meantime Melchior also had followed faithfully the path along which the star seemed to lead. Through forests in which he almost lost his way, across rivers difficult and dangerous to ford—still

We must
follow
the star

The just
shall live
by faith

he followed on. At length Melchior's star seemed to tarry over the spire of a gothic church, into which the people were going in throngs. Waiting a moment, to be sure that the star was actually standing still, Melchior went in with the rest. In this place was no altar, such as Gaspard saw; no image on the cross; no white-robed priests; no swinging censers. But, as Melchior entered he heard strains from the organ, and a chorus of voices was singing an anthem beginning with the words, "Te Deum Laudamus." And when the anthem came to a close, a man clothed in a black robe, such as scholars were wont to wear, rose in his place upon a platform elevated above the people, and began to speak to them about the kingdom of the Christ. Melchior listened in eager expectancy. "The kingdom of the Christ," the preacher said, "is the kingdom of the Truth, and the truth is to be con-

tinued and kept alive by the strength and constancy of man's belief. Those things which have been handed down by holy men and sacred oracles since Christ was here upon the earth, are the truths by which we live. How can Christ live, except He live in our beliefs? Why did the Father of all intrust us with our reasons, unless it were that we should make them the instruments of our faith and our salvation? Let us therefore stand in our places, while we recite together the articles of our holy faith."

These and many such words did the scholar-preacher declare. And as he sat there with the people, Melchior felt the weight of the solemn and earnest words, and he said: "So at last have I come to the end of my search. The kingdom of Christ is in the mind of man. His kingdom is the kingdom of the truth."

Then he followed the throngs as they went forth from the church; but

The truth shall make you free

More
light shall
break forth

the star which had tarried over the lofty spire was now before him, and the opal light wavered and trembled, as if beckoning him on; and the words of the preacher, "we must believe," seemed to blend with the words of Balthazar, "we must follow the star." So, reluctantly and slowly, he followed on.



UT Balthazar—whither went he, following the star? Over many a rugged way, through many a tangled thicket, through valleys and over hills. His star tarried over no cathedrals; it lingered over no gothic spires. It seemed capricious and restless and tireless. At times it seemed intent on coming to a pause over the head of some human being, but perhaps it was because these human beings themselves were so restless and so busy that the star could not accomplish its intent. For Balthazar

saw these men and women hurrying hither and thither on errands of mercy, or deeds of justice; he saw them ferreting out great wrongs, laying heavy blows on the backs of men who oppressed and defrauded their fellow men.

At length Balthazar seemed to understand the movements of the star, and, drawing nearer, he would seem to hear these men repeating cheering and encouraging words to one another. "Pure religion and undefiled," he heard one exclaiming, "is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." And another echoed: "Inasmuch as we do it to the least of these, we do it unto Christ."

"Ah!" thought Balthazar as he listened, I see the meaning of it now; I am coming to the end of my search. The kingdom of Christ—I have found it. It is in the deeds of men; it is in the

The joy of
doing good

conscience and the serving will. Devotion to right, this is the law of the kingdom of Christ."

Then Balthazar turned to go in search of his comrades again; but behold! the opal star was trembling, as if beckoning him on. So, still doubting if he had reached the end of his search, he followed the star.



THUS Gaspard, Melchior and Balthazar, each following the star, at last approached each other. The star of each seemed to melt and blend into the star of the others, and the opal light stood at last in the center of the group. Gaspard exclaimed: "I have found that which we all were seeking. The kingdom of Christ is in the imagination; Christ lives in what man feels."

"Nay," said Melchior, "I have followed the star, and I have found what we sought. The kingdom of Christ is

in the reason of man. Christ lives in what man believes."

"But," cried Balthazar, "my star has led me to a different end. The kingdom of Christ is in the will of man. Christ lives in what man does."

"The truth," once more exclaimed Melchior, "is the law of the kingdom."

"Not truth," declared Balthazar, "but justice, righteousness, goodness and purity—these are its laws and its marks."

"Nay, comrades beloved, hearken to me," answered Gaspard; "it is the miracle of the divine presence. It is God among men, realized in the holy mass. I beheld it all in yonder cathedral."

But lo! once more the star began to tremble and to change its place.

"Let us follow the star!" Balthazar whispered. "We will follow it," echoed the other two.

Once more
the quest

Then the star led them on, and they followed together until they came at length to the doorway of a little cottage; and within the cottage they saw a woman bending over a cradle, and in the cradle a little child lay sleeping. She was a peasant woman; her clothing was not rich; the furnishing of the cottage was humble and scanty. The cradle itself was rude, as if put together by hands unskilful in tasks like that. But when the mother looked at her babe a sweet smile played about her lips, and a light was in her eyes. Then all suddenly the three men remembered another scene long before, when they were bearers of gold and frankincense and myrrh to another babe.

And while they stood and wondered by the door, there came a strong and sturdy peasant, broad-shouldered, roughly clad, his face browned in the sun, his hands hardened with toil.

He came and stood beside the woman, and they bent together over the cradle of the sleeping child, and the man drew the woman tenderly toward him and kissed her brow.

He that
loveth
knoweth God

And still the three men lingered; for behold! the star stood still above the child, and they dared not speak. But the heart of Gaspard was saying in silence, "There is something greater than the repeated miracle of the mass."

And Melchior was thinking, "There is something mightier even than the mind; something superior to naked truth."

And Balthazar was confessing to himself that he had found something more potent even than the righteous deed. For here they all beheld how life was made sweet and blessed and holy by the power of love; and by love for a little child, in whom was all weakness and helplessness, whose

For God
is love

only voice was a cry, but who was all strong and mighty with the power of God, because he could transform roughness into tenderness, and selfishness into loving care, and poverty itself into gifts of gold and fragrant myrrh.

“Truly, my comrades,” Balthazar said, “love is the greatest of all.”

“And now I understand,” said Gaspard, “how the weak things of the world can confound the mighty.”

“And I,” added Melchior, “see what it means for God to come to earth in the form of a little child.”

And so they turned away, and the radiance of the star was round about them, and they were saying to each other: “Our search at last is ended.”

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